Memories of Koos den Hartog

It was in May 1972 when I first met Koos den Hartog. It was on Curaçao at the Caribbean Marine Biological Institute, where Koos had started his studies on sea anemones. I was staying at the guesthouse, while waiting to participate in the second part of the Saba Bank Expedition aboard Hr. Ms. *Luymes*. The goal of this expedition was to study the benthology of the Saba bank and surrounding areas. It was organised in large part by the National Museum of Natural History, where I was employed as a technician. I remember very well how we were welcomed by the den Hartog family, not knowing that later on Koos and I would work together for many years to come. I also remember that my colleague Cor Cornet and myself helped the family move out of the guesthouse and into a house of their own. On Curaçao Koos studied sea anemones (Actiniaria) and corallimorpharians (Corallimorpharia). Later on he would become a specialist in the complex taxonomy of these groups.

Koos (left) and Chiel during the Seychelles expedition.

At the time I was head technician with Professor Vervoort, director of the National Museum of Natural History and curator of the department of Coelenterata. Because of his many duties as a director and teacher, another curator was needed for the department. After two years of fieldwork in the Caribbean, Koos at that time was continuing his studies at Leiden University. Bearing in mind the animal groups he studied, and his past field experiences, it was obvious that he would be the first one approached to fill the position of curator of the department of Coelenterata. In 1975 Koos was appointed and thus started his career as a scientist and curator in the museum. I myself was very pleased with his appointment and had the pleasure to become Koos' assistant. I looked forward to working with him.

Marine research had a prominent place in the museum, so it was logical that Koos, as the successor to Professor Vervoort, would also take part in the field work, starting with our CANCAP expeditions, which took place roughly in the area between the Azores and the Cape Verde islands. The first of those expeditons occurred in 1976 aboard Hr. Ms. *Onversaagd*, an old refitted ocean minesweeper. On this rather unstable ship seasickness reigned. Koos, who was very susceptible to seasickness, used to leave behind a trail of small empty plastic bags wherever he went. The peak of seasickness mostly comes unexpected, hence the precautionary supply of bags. Nevertheless, he was in the front rank when the catches came in. The first CANCAP expedition took place in the area between Madeira and Morocco. During this expedition the weather was rather bad and part of the time the rolling ship made it impossible to do much work. Another six CANCAP expeditions would follow, but under much better circumstances. In 1977, the Royal Netherlands Navy put a new hydrographical vessel, Hr. Ms. *Tydeman*, into service. It was specially built to perform civilian marine research as well. The ship was equipped with trawls and other bottom sampling equipment. In addition to the crew she could accommodate fifteen scientists and technicians. I vividly remember that Koos had a great interest in the sophisticated anti-rolling system of the ship. Dr Jaap van der Land was leader of the expeditions, and Koos den Hartog was his second in command. Such an expedition is a complex venture, which takes months of preparation in advance. Dozens of crates with supplies and hundreds of litres of preserving liquid had to be taken along. Koos more or less had his own equipment. For medical reasons he could not participate in the SCUBA diving, but this did not keep him from collecting. Typically, Koos would snorkle, using a car inner tube as a float to which he attached a net for storing specimens. Thus he could be left behind at a collecting site while others went SCUBA diving. I got the task to collect the deeper living sea anemone species. Koos was a fanatical collector. On board he worked hard and in the water he felt at home. His enthusiasm and love for nature were contagious. He was a real field biologist with a large factual knowledge of many animal groups. Besides his knowledge about his favourite groups, Actiniaria and Corallimorpharia, he also had a great interest in sea birds. Koos loved nature in the broadest sense of the word. We got to know each other very well on the ship, as we worked together day and night. It is obvious that the museum people formed a strong team. During night watches we had ample time to talk about our personal lives, which always had Koos' interest as well.

The last large oceanographic expedition was in 1993, to the Seychelles, on r.v. *Tyro*. We celebrated Christmas and New Years Eve with temperatures of about 35°C.

Despite these high temperatures the traditional fritters tasted good. For the time being, such large ocean going expeditions are a thing of the past. With much pleasure I recall those days. From then onour marine fieldwork was organised differently, but again Koos played a prominent role. Regrettably, the planned expedition in the autumn of 2000 to Indonesia (Bali) happened too late for him.

Under the enthusiastic guidance of Koos as curator of "our" department of Coelenterata, the collections, especially the Actiniaria, grew enormously. These collections not only grew in size, but their scientific importance also increased at the same rate. His knowledge in his field of expertise was enormous. From all corners of the world appeal was made to his knowledge of sea anemones and related groups, and he corresponded with dozens of scientists from many countries. His helpfulness often went at the expense of his own research.

Although I knew that his devastating sickness would end his life, it happened rather fast and unexpected. Especially in the last month his physical strength declined rapidly. Unfortunately, he could not finish his work, and he still had so many plans; there still was so much to do. Without him the department will never be the same. "His" department deserves permanent attention, so that his unfinished work as a curator and scientist can continue. That way his work and collections will remain available to benefit the research of colleagues. This was his wish, and if permitted, I myself will do the utmost to do so.

Besides his work as a biologist and curator, Koos was also involved in social issues. He had a pleasant manner in dealing with people, but also could give his opinion straightforward with a natural inner urge to help the underdog. His input in social matters will be missed.

So much I will miss him. Never again talks about our families, never again travel together, never again discussions about work, never again having a chat about a difficult mountain-stage in the Tour the France (Koos also loved sports), never again talks about nature he loved so much, and his hobbies like collecting books, observing badgers, and never again that special attention at my birthday. With great pleasure I recall the 25 years we worked together, what luck it was to have met him and his wife Ruth in 1972 on Curaçao. Thanks for everything Koos. It was a privilege to have known Koos den Hartog.

On Thursday 7 October 2000 we said farewell to Koos, surrounded by his family, a large number of friends, acquaintances and colleagues. It was an impressive ceremony that I will never forget. Koos den Hartog reached an age of only 58 years.

Chiel Slierings
Colleague and assistant of Koos den Hartog